

and mowen, that it lyke unto youre grete goodnesse to fulfyllen in dede youre goodliche wordes; for we consideren & knowelichen that we han offended and greved my lord Melibee out of mesure; so ferforth, that we be nat of power to maken his amendes; & therefore we oblige and bynden us and oure freendes to doon al his wyl & his comandements. But peraventure he hath swich hevynesse and swich wraethe to usward bycause of oure offense, that he wole enioyne us swich a peyne as we mowe nat bere ne susteine; and therfore, noble lady, we biseke to youre wommanly pitee, to taken swich avysement in this nede, that we, ne oure freendes, be nat desherited ne destroyed thurgh oure folye.

CERTES, quod Prudence, it is an hard thyng and right perilous, that a man putte hym al outrely in thearbitracioun and juggement, & in the myght & power of his enemy; for Salomon seith, *Leeveth me, and yeveth credence to that I shal seyn; I seye, quod he, ye peple, folk, and governours of hooly chirche, to thy sone, to thy wyf, to thy frend, ne to thy broother, ne yeve thou nevere myght ne maistrie of thy body, whil thou lyvest.*

NOW sithen he defendeth that man shal nat yeven to his broother, ne to his frend, the myght of his body, by strengier resoun he defendeth and forbedeth a man to yeven hymself to his enemy. And natheles I conseilte you, that ye mystruste nat my lord; for I woot wel and knowe verraily, that he is debonaire and meeke, large, curteys, and nothyng desirous ne covetous of good ne richesse; for ther nys nothyng in this world that he desireth, save oonly worshipec & honour, forthermoore I knowe wel, and am right seur, that he shal nothyng doon in this nede withouten my conseil. And I shal so werken in this cause that, by grace of oure Lord God, ye shul been reconciled unto us.

THANNE seyden they with o voys, *Worshipful lady, we putten us and oure goodes al fully in youre wil and disposicioun; & been redy to comen, what day that it like unto youre noblesse to ly-myte us or assigne us, for to maken oure obligacioun & boond as strong as it liketh unto youre goodnesse; that we mowe fulfille the wille of yow & of my lord Melibee.*

WHAN dame Prudence hadde herd the answeres of these men, she bad hem goon agayn prively; and she retourned to hir lord Melibee, & tolde hym how she foond his adversaries ful repentant, knowelechyng ful lowely hir synnes and trespas, & how they were redy to suffren al peyne, requiryng and preyng hym of mercy and pitee.

THANNE seyde Melibee, *He is wel worthy to have pardoun and foryiffnesse of his synne, that excuseth nat his synne, but knowelecheth it & repenteth hym, axinge indulgence, for Senec seith, Ther is the remissoun and foryiffnesse, whereas confessioun is; for confessioun is neighobore to innocence. And heseith in another place: He that hath shame for his synne & knowlecheth it, is worthy remys-sioun; & therfore I assente and conferme me to have pees; but it is good that we do it nat withouten the assent & wyl of oure freendes.*

THANNE was Prudence right glad & joyeful, & seyde, Certes, sire, quod she, ye han wel and goodly answered; for right as by the conseil, assent & helpe of youre freendes, ye han been stired to venge yow and maken were, right so withouten hire conseil shul ye nat accorden yow, ne have pees with youre adversaries; for the lawe seith, *Ther nys nothyng so good by wey of kynde as a thyng to been un-bounde by hym that it was ybounde.*

AND thanne dame Prudence, with-outen delay or taryng, sente anon hire messages for hire kyn, and for hire olde freendes whiche that were trewe and wyse, and tolde hem by ordre, in the presence of Melibee, al this matere as it is aboven expressed & declared; and preyden hem that they wolde yeven hire avys & conseil what best were to doon in this nede. And whan Melibees freendes hadde taken hire avys and deliberacioun of the forseide matere, and hadden examyned it by greet bisynesse and greet diligence, they yave ful conseil for to have pees and reste; and that Melibee sholde receyve with good herte his adversaries to foryiffnesse and mercy.

AND whan dame Prudence hadde herd the assent of hir lord Melibee, and the conseil of his freendes, accorde with hire wille and hire entencion, she was wonderly glad in hire herte, and seyde: Ther is an old proverbe, quod she, seith: that the goodnesse that thou mayst do this day, do it, & abide nat ne delaye it nat til tomorwe. And therfore I conseilte that ye sende youre messages, swiche as been discrete and wise, unto youre adversaries; tellyng hem on youre bihalve, that if they wole trete of pees and of accord, that they shape hem, withouten delay or taryng, to comen unto us. Which thyng parfourned was in dede. And whanne these trespas-sours and repentyng folk of hire folies, that is to seyn, the adversaries of Melibee, hadden herd what this messagers seyden unto hem, they weren right glad & joyeful, and answered ful mekely and benignely, yeldyng graces & thankynges to hir lord

Melibee & to al his compaignye; & shopen hem, withouten delay to go with the messagers, and obeye to the comandement of hir lord Melibee.

AND right anon they taken hire wey to the court of Melibee, and took en with hem somme of hire trewe freendes to maken feith for hem and for to been hire borwes. And whan they were comen to the presence of Melibee, he seyde hem these wordes, *It standeth thus, quod Melibee, and gooth it is, that ye, causeless, and withouten shile and resoun, han doon grete injuries and wronges to me and to my wyf Prudence, & to my doghter also, for ye han entred into myn hous by violence, and have doon swich outrage, that alle men knowen wel that ye have disserved the deeth, and therefore wol I knowe & wite of yow, whether ye wol putte the punysshment & the chastisyng of me and of my wyf Prudence; or ye wol nat?*

THANNE the wiseste of hem thre answered for hem alle, and seyde, Sire, quod he, we knowen wel that we been unworthy to comen unto the court of so greet a lord, & so worthy as ye been; for we han so greetly mystaken us, & han offened & agilt in swich a wise agayn youre heigh lordshipe, that trewely we han disserved the deeth. But yet for the grete goodnesse and debonairetee that al the world witnesseth in youre persone, we submytten us to the excellence and benigntee of youre gracious lordshipe, and been redy to obeie to alle youre comandements; bisekyng yow, that of youre merciable pitee ye wol considere oure grete repentaunce and lowe submyssioun, and graunten us foryevnesse of oure outrageous trespas and offense, for wel we knowe that youre liberal grace and mercy strechen hem ferther in to goodnesse, than doon oure outrageous giltes & trespas into wikkednesse; albeit that cursedly and dampnably we han agilt agayn youre heigh lordshipe.

THANNE Melibee took hem up fro the ground ful benignely, and receyved hire obligaciouns and hire boondes by hire othes upon hire plegges & borwes, and assigned hem a certeyn day to retourne unto his court, for to accepte and receyve the sentence and juggement that Melibee wolde comande to be doon on hem by the causes aforesayd; whiche thynges ordeyned, every man retourned to his hous.

AND whan that dame Prudence saugh hir tyme, she freyned & axed hir lord Melibee, what vengeance he thoughte to taken of his adversaries.

O which Melibee answerde and seyde, Certes, quod he, I thynke and purpose me fully to desherite hem of al that evere they han, and for to putte hem in exil for evere.

CERTES, quod dame Prudence, this were a cruel sentence, and muchel agayn resoun; for ye been riche ynough, & han nonede of oother mennes good; & ye myghte lightly in this wise gete yow a covetous name, which is a vicious thyng, & oghte been eschued of every good man; for after the sawe of the word of the Apostle, *Covetise is roote of alle harmes.* And therfore it were bettre for yow to lege so muchel good of youre owene, than for to taken of hire good in this manere; for bettre it is to lesen with worshipec, than it is to wyne good with vileynye and shame; and everi man oghte to doon his diligence and his bisynesse to geten hym a good name. And yet shal he nat oonly bisie hym in kep- yng of his good name, but he shal also enforcen hym alwey to dosomthyng by which he may renouvelle his good name; for it is writen that, *The olde good loos or good name of a man is soone goon and passed, whan it is nat newed ne renovelled.*

AND as touchyng that ye seyn, ye wole exile youre adversaries, that thynketh me muchel agayn resoun and out of mesure, considered the power that they han yeven yow upon hemself. And it is writen, that he is worthy to lesen his privilege that mysuseth the myght and the power that is yeven hym. And I sette cas, ye myght enioyne hem that peyne by right and by lawe, which I trowe ye mowe nat do. I seye, ye mighte nat putten it to execucioun peraventure, and thanne were it likly to retourne to the werre as it was bifore; & therfore if ye wole that men do yow obeisance, ye moste deemen moore curteisly; this is to seyn, ye moste yeven moore easy sentences & juggements. For it is writen, that he that moost curteisly comandeth, to hym men moost obeyen. And therfore I prey yow that in this necessitee & in this nede, ye caste yow to overcome youre herte, for Senec seith: that he that overcometh his herte, overcometh twies; and Tullius seith, *Ther is nothyng so comendable in a greet lord as whan he is debonaire & meeke, and appeseth him lightly.* And I prey yow that ye wole forbere now to do vengeance, in swich a manere, that youre goode name may be kept and conserved; and that men mowe have cause & matere to preysse yow of pitee & of mercy, & that ye have no cause to repente yow of thyng that ye doon; for Senec seith, *He overcometh in an yvel manere, that repenteth hym of his victorie.* Wherefore, I pray yow, lat mercy been in